

STATEMENT of CONGRESSMAN MICHAEL MICHAUD
Testimony on H.R. 1808, the “Maine Coastal Islands Wilderness Act”
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands
House Committee on Natural Resources
Tuesday, July 23, 2013

Chairman Bishop, Ranking Member Grijalva, and Members of the Subcommittee – thank you for holding this hearing on H.R. 1808, the “*Maine Coastal Islands Wilderness Act*.” I would also like to thank Chairman Hastings and Ranking Member DeFazio of the full committee for their continued efforts to address wilderness issues.

Marc Bourgoin will also testify today in support of this bill. Marc is the co-owner of Lincoln Canoe and Kayak in Freeport Maine. His company is one of the oldest manufacturers of canoes and kayaks in the state. He also runs a guiding service and will discuss the local benefits and support of the bill.

I want to express my appreciation for the Friends of Maine Seabird Islands and Representative Pingree for partnering with me on this legislation, which includes islands in both of Maine’s Congressional Districts.

H.R. 1808 would designate 13 coastal islands as federal wilderness areas within the Maine Coastal Islands National Wildlife Refuge complex. This wilderness designation will increase the marketability of this area to tourists and give a boost to the local economy.

It will also codify the current status of these islands, maintaining the thoughtful balance between recreational, fishing and aquaculture, and refuge uses.

This bill is based on the 2006 recommendations from the Maine Coastal Islands Wildlife Refuge.

Since that recommendation my office has heard from multiple organizations asking me to introduce legislation that would codify the wilderness designation for these islands. We also conducted our own outreach efforts to gauge support for the bill.

Based on these outreach efforts, I inserted key provisions in this legislation to preserve the islands’ current status. First, my legislation clarifies the seaward boundary of each wilderness island to be the well-defined high water mark to ensure that motorized boats can still land on these islands, a priority for local fishermen and recreationists.

Hunting and fishing are important to Mainers, and, as made clear in the Fish and Wildlife Handbook, these activities will be able to continue on the Wilderness islands currently open to hunting.

Second, the legislation clarifies that there are no buffer zones adjacent to the wilderness boundaries.

Third, my legislation allows for the installation of essential navigational devices to accommodate all public safety concerns.

Finally, this bill explicitly protects private property rights by excluding all private lands and access right-of-ways from the recommended wilderness boundaries.

I believe this bill is a balanced approach to conserving these unique island landscapes while making sure that the public can still enjoy them.

This bill will also have economic benefits for these coastal communities. According to the Maine Office of Tourism, overnight visitors to Maine last year pumped \$5 billion into our state's economy.

This legislation will make it easier for these communities to market themselves and grow their nature-based tourism.

The Penobscot Bay Regional Chamber of Commerce and the Ellsworth Area Chamber of Commerce, as well as many other local organizations, support this wilderness designation for this reason.

My legislation codifies the islands' current status and ensures their accessibility will remain the same.

In closing, once again I would like to thank Chairman Bishop and Ranking Member Grijalva for bringing this bill before the Subcommittee and for the opportunity to provide my testimony today. I ask the committee to support this balanced effort to help local communities in Maine enhance their efforts to grow their nature-based tourism sectors while preserving the accessibility and use of these coastal islands.

Thank you.